

LANDSCAPE-BASED FOREST RESOURCE PLANNING AND COORDINATION FRAMEWORK

“The council shall establish a framework that will enable long-range strategic planning and landscape coordination to occur, to the extent possible, across all forested regions of the state and across all ownerships.”(MS § 89A.06, subd. 1 of the Sustainable Forest Resources Act)

The Minnesota Forest Resources Council has established the four components of this framework as follows:

DEFINE FORESTED LANDSCAPES

Landscapes are the areas within which long-range planning of the state’s forest resources will occur. These landscapes are based on broadly defined ecological units and existing classification systems, yet recognize existing political and administrative boundaries and planning processes.

The state is delineated into 6 forested landscapes plus the “metro” area and prairie. Delineation is based on a close match between county lines and section/sub-section lines of the Ecological Classification System (ECS) with county lines being the final determinant (refer to map of recommended landscapes). The Council’s intent is to place emphasis on the 6 major forested landscapes in the State and then begin working with the prairie and metro landscapes.

Ecological assessments will be based on ECS sections and/or combinations of sub-sections within the delineated landscapes. Regional committees for each landscape will be assigned the lead responsibility for ecological assessments that cross over county boundaries, as follows:

Landscape 1: Northern Superior Uplands Section
Southern Superior Uplands Section

Landscape 2: Northern Minnesota & Ontario Peatlands Section
Lake Agassiz, Aspen Parklands Section

Landscape 3: Hardwood Hills Sub-section

Landscape 4: Minnesota Drift & Lake Plains Section

Landscape 5: Western Superior Upland Section
Anoka Sand Plain Subsection

Landscape 6: Big Woods, Oak Savannah, Rochester Plateau, Blufflands Subsection

Metro: St. Croix Moraines & Outwash Plains Subsection

Prairie: North Central Glaciated Plains Section
Red River Valley Section

PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

The goals and principles are sufficiently well-defined to provide structure to committee actions and outcomes, yet broad enough to allow them an opportunity to exercise their own creativity and to accommodate the diverse environmental, economic and community conditions that occur with the regions for which they are responsible.

Goals

Goals are conditions or outcomes that are desired for a region's forested landscape. They are the conditions that an engaged community of forestry interests would agree are desirable for the forests, economies and communities within a region. Goals provide a sense of direction, especially with regard to outcomes that will be accomplished over the long-term.

1. land area covered by forests within a region's landscape will be the same or larger.
2. forests within a region's landscape will be in a variety of ownerships, serving both public and private interests.
3. within forested landscapes, healthy, resilient, and functioning ecosystems will be maintained within appropriate mixes of forest cover types and age classes to promote timber production, biological diversity, and viable forest dependent fish and wildlife habitats.
4. forests within a region's landscape will be providing a full range of products, services, and values, including timber products, wildlife and tourism, that are major contributors to economic stability, environmental quality, social satisfaction, and community well-being.
5. forests within a region's landscape will be viewed by citizens as integral contributors to the quality of life enjoyed by current as well as future generations. The citizenry will be knowledgeable about forest conditions and opportunities within the region and actively engaged in their stewardship.
6. forest conditions and issues within the region's landscape will be better understood by the Minnesota Forest Resources Council through its regional committee.

Principles

Principles are guidelines that guide the selection of actions that might be used to accomplish agreed to goals. They help decide which of many actions or activities will be most useful in accomplishing a region's landscape-level goals. They are not set forth as actions (or policies or programs), but simply provide a structure for the way decisions about landscape-level planning and coordination might occur. Principles are also useful in guiding the process that is used to identify certain actions.

Principles Guiding the Selection of Strategies

Landscape coordinating actions ...

1. effectively address the major forest resource issues identified in the region to achieve the goals established by the regional committees.
2. respect differences in goals and objectives of public and private forest owners within a forested landscape, as well as the rights and responsibilities of forest land ownership.
3. reflect a regional landscape's broad diversity of interests and perspectives in the use, management and protection of forest resources.
4. are selected after thoughtful deliberation and careful review of a variety of potential actions (policies/programs) that might be voluntarily undertaken by landowners.
5. are guided by the most currently available, science-based information about the condition of the region's forests, economies, and communities.
6. reflect adaptive management processes that involve opportunity for continuous learning experiences.
7. are capable of being fully implemented with existing (or forthcoming) financial and professional resources.
8. will promote forest practices that improve forest ecosystem health, resiliency and productivity within forested landscapes which, when aggregated, will achieve statewide goals.

Principles Guiding the Landscape Coordination Process

Landscape coordinating actions ...

1. result from cooperation and coordination among and between landowners, agencies and organizations responsible for forested landscapes.
2. result from open and continuous communication and dialogue among all parties interested in sustaining regional forested landscapes.
3. result from an engaged public that supports and has confidence in the effectiveness of the landscape-level planning and coordination process being implemented by the Minnesota Forest Resources Council through its regional committees.

GENERAL PLANNING PROCESS

The general planning process must give considerable latitude to allow the design of planning processes that fit the unique needs, resources, and conditions of each landscape. The planning process must also reflect an integrated consideration of the economic, social and environmental factors influencing the condition of each landscape

The term “planning”, as used here, means bringing together locally-based stakeholders to identify a common vision, evaluate current and prospective future forest resource conditions, and develop strategies to achieve the vision. The term “coordination” refers to information sharing and communication among forestland managers within the landscape about achieving the broad-based strategies as well as individual projects that will maintain or enhance the landscape. Specifically, the process is to foster regional development of strategies that will enable the accomplishment of a desired vision for a region’s forests, economies and communities.

Among many hoped for outcomes of the *general planning process* are better communication and coordination among forest land managers within a landscape region. Specifically, the voluntary coordination encouraged by the process should (a) enable forest land managers to gain a better understanding of land management activities occurring on other forest properties within a region, (b) enable regional forest resource committees to be better informed of planned forest management and related activities within their region, (c) enable forest landowners generally to better understand the implications of various land management activities on ecological, economic, and social conditions within a region, (d) develop and provide better information on forest land management, (e) to provide an opportunity for land managers/owners to voluntarily adjust their management to help achieve the vision for the landscape, and (f) promote a better climate for public education about forest land management.

A brief description of planning steps follows:

a. **Assessment:** The purpose of an assessment is to provide each committee with accurate baseline information on existing and potential ecological, social and economic conditions in the landscape areas. Assessments will bring together information across ownerships to give a broad perspective and will help people accept and understand the data used in the assessment. Assessments will be an ongoing and interactive process as the committees address issues and needs more specific information.

Key elements of ecological assessments, which evaluate ecosystem integrity, include: a system for collecting and evaluating ecological information; an understanding of historical vegetation and disturbance patterns; and characterizing existing and potential vegetation patterns and ecological conditions. Social and economic assessments will appraise the region’s social and economic conditions as they related to regional economic activity, income and employment and general community health. The Interagency Information Cooperative will play an important leadership role in assembling the best information available that describes current and potential conditions of a landscape region. This assessment process will require a team of people skilled in data analysis, geographic information systems and natural resource management.

b. **Vision, Goals, and Issues:** Using information provided by the assessment, the regional committee will identify a common vision and goals for addressing existing and potential conditions considered desirable for the region. The vision and goals will address regional ecological, economic and social

concerns and be consistent with the broader statewide vision and goals developed by the Council. As part of the process, a regional committee will define issues that prevent its regional vision and goals from being achieved.

c. Evaluate Potential Strategies: Identify and evaluate alternative strategies based on their ability to achieve desired ecological, economic, and social conditions as identified by a region's vision or goals. Perspectives and information provided by land managers responsible for implementing plans and programs will be important to the identification and evaluation of alternative strategies.

d. Identify Agreed-to Strategies: Identify desired strategies for a landscape region. Selection of strategies will be consensus-based; committee member agreement will be entirely voluntary. Agreed to strategies must respect the rights, responsibilities, and objectives of landowners and managers both public and private.

e. Implement Agreed to Strategies. Regional forest resource committees will seek voluntary implementation of their agreed to strategies, with a special focus on coordination of land management plans and programs being implemented by public and private landowners. This will involve extensive communication, discussion and sharing of information between private landowners and public land managers within the landscape area.

f. Evaluation. Regional forest resource committees will periodically evaluate the ability of the agreed to strategies to accomplish the vision and goals set forth for their region. The evaluation will be used to make adjustments in the strategies or the manner in which they are implemented. Monitoring information developed by the Minnesota Forest Resources Council's monitoring program will be used to update assessments and conditions in the landscape region.

REGIONAL FOREST RESOURCE COMMITTEES

Regional forest resource committees are the mechanism by which landscape-based forest resource planning will occur. A committee will be established in each of the defined landscapes. Committees....

- C include representative interests in a particular region that are committed to and involved in landscape planning and coordination activities;
- C serve as a forum for landowners, managers, and representative interests to discuss landscape forest resource issues;
- C identify and implement an open and public process whereby landscape-based strategic planning of forest resources can occur;
- C identify sustainable forest resource goals for the landscape and strategies to achieve those goals; and
- C provide a regional perspective to the Council with respect to Council activities.

Criteria for Membership

Individuals serving on the MFRC's regional forest resource committees must:

- C reside (including seasonally) within the landscape region for which the regional committee has responsibility for fostering landscape-based planning and coordinating activities.
- C be committed to the goal of sustainable forest management and be interested in or affected by management of forest resources within the landscape region.
- C be willing to work collaboratively with others, including those with different interests and values with respect to fostering landscape-based planning and coordination.

- C be able to commit the time and energy required to further the landscape based planning and coordination goals of the regional committee.
- C recognize the voluntary nature of the landscape-base planning and coordination program.

Committee Size and Representation

- C The regional forest resource committees should strive to be inclusive yet be a manageable number of people. Size may vary among landscape regions, depending on the specific needs and level of interest in forest resources and/or landscape-based planning and coordination within each landscape region.
- C To the extent possible and practical, regional committees shall be composed of a balanced yet diverse set of interests with respect to the management and use of the forest resources within the landscape region. Public and private forestland managers should be involved in the landscape planning and coordination program.

Appointment of Regional Forest Resource Committees

- C The Council, in cooperation with the Forest Resources Partnership and other interested local organizations, will notify the public of the process to establish regional committees and encourage interested people to participate.
- C The landscape program coordinator working with the Council, Partnership and other interested local organizations will convene several information meetings in the landscape region to inform and encourage interested people to participate.
- C People interested in participating will respond, in writing, to the Council's selection criteria.
- C After the information meetings are completed, all interested people who have responded in writing and who meet the Council's membership criteria will be encouraged to attend a meeting to select the regional committee. The Council's Landscape Program Subcommittee will establish the sideboards for selection of the committee members. Using these sideboards for guidance, participants will self-select members to the regional committee, subject to Council approval.
- C All interested people will have the opportunity to be involved in the process of landscape planning and coordination; those not serving on the regional committee will have the opportunity to become part of a formal network that the regional committee will utilize for feedback, ad-hoc working assignments, subcommittees, etc.
- C After consultation with the Partnership (refer to section 89A.04 Sustainable Forest Resources Act), the Council is responsible for formally approving participants to the regional committees.
- C Participants serving on regional committees will have a set term of 4 years. Initially, one half of the terms will be for 2 yrs., one half for 4 yrs. This will establish a staggered term and insure continuity for the committee. Each committee will determine the frequency of meetings and operational guidelines necessary to accomplish the goals they set for the landscape.

Regional Committee Operation and Staff Support

- C Within the framework set forth by the Council, regional committees will be encouraged to establish an open and public process that fosters landscape-based forest resources planning and coordination which address the unique needs and resources of each landscape region.
- C All regional committee meetings will be open to the public.

- C The Council will be responsible for ensuring that regional committees have the staff required to effectively carry out their responsibilities. The landscape program coordinator will be responsible for overall staffing coordination and administration of the regional forest resource committees. Facilitating, data gathering, analyzing and administrative skills are the principal staff support needs of the regional forest resource committees. Organizations represented on the Council will be the principal source of technical support and the Information Cooperative will have the lead role in providing data and information to the regional committees. Additional skills can be obtained from a variety of sources including contracting out services to meet specific needs. It is the regional committee's responsibility to determine how best to staff the committee and to provide direction to staff work.
- C The Council will cover committee member's out-of-pocket costs (e.g., mileage reimbursement, food, lodging) resulting from their participation in regional committee activities.
- C The Council, in cooperation with the Partnership and other interested local organizations, will conduct a general orientation session to give committee members an overall orientation to landscape-based planning and coordination. Each regional committee will hold an individual committee organization and collaborative skill development meeting to develop their operational by laws, their group norms and behaviors, select a chairperson and start building trust and good working relationships.